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SUBJECT: CROATIA RECOGNIZES CROATIA, ISSUES JOINT STATEMENT WITH
HUNGARY AND BULGARIA

REF: ZAGREB 262

¶1. As forecast in reftel, the Government of Croatia, in its afternoon press briefing, announced that it has taken the decision today, March 19, to recognize Kosovo. Government spokesman Zlatko Mehun said that the formal text of the decision to recognize was being prepared and would be released shortly. In a statement for the press, PM Ivo Sanader said that he did not expect negative consequences for Croatia's relationship with Serbia as a result of the recognition decision, adding that there was no alternative to good neighborly relations between the two countries.

¶2. Just prior to the decision on recognition, the GOC released, in coordination with the governments of Bulgaria and Hungary, a joint declaration from all three states explaining their intention to recognize Kosovo, but stressing their interest in maintaining good relations with Serbia. Full text of the joint statement in English is in para 4.

¶3. Local media also reported that Slobodan Uzelac, Croatia's Deputy Prime Minister representing the Croatian Serb party that is one of Sanader's partners in the ruling coalition, had offered his resignation, saying that Croatia should have waited for longer before deciding to recognize Kosovo. PM Sanader responded that while "I understand his action, I do not accept his resignation."

¶4. BEGIN JOINT STATEMENT TEXT:

The Governments of Bulgaria and Hungary as EU Member States, the Government of Croatia as an EU candidate country negotiating on accession, all three countries neighbouring Serbia, have agreed to issue the following statement with regard to their forthcoming national decisions on the recognition of Kosovo:

The declaration of independence of Kosovo came after the failure of all the efforts of the international community to find a negotiated solution between Belgrade and Pristina on the status of Kosovo. In these circumstances the change of the unsustainable status quo was unavoidable. Kosovo is a sui generis case arising from the unique circumstances of the disintegration of former Yugoslavia as well as the continued period of international administration.

The three countries attach paramount importance to a maximum degree of stability in South-Eastern Europe and a clear European perspective for all countries in the region.

The Kosovo institutions have committed themselves, inter alia by adopting relevant legislation, to fully implement the principles and the arrangements envisaged by the UNSG Special Envoy's Comprehensive Proposal (Ahtisaari Plan) for the Kosovo Status Settlement. They have also declared their readiness to welcome an international presence in Kosovo in accordance with UNSCR 1244.

The decision on the recognition of Kosovo is based on thorough consideration and on the conclusions adopted by the General Affairs and External Relations Council of the European Union on 12 February 2007 and 18 February 2008, as well as by the European Council on 14 December 2007.

The three countries will continue to support the active commitment of the EU and NATO to the stability and democracy-building in Kosovo. Kosovo institutions should provide guarantees for a

multi-ethnic state, based on the principles of democracy, rule of law, ensuring broad rights for Serb and other communities, including their effective participation in all institutions. This process is to be supervised by the international community.

The three countries express their interest in developing ties with a Serbia that maintains good relations with its neighbours, enjoys economic growth and keeps its European orientation.

The three countries believe that European integration is the only solid and sustainable platform for economic development, social progress and prosperity for all countries of the region, including Serbia.

The three countries support the further strengthening of ties between Serbia and the Union. Earlier they stood by securing visa facilitation for and later encouraged the opening of talks on visa liberalization with Serbia that could lead to further travel facilitations for its citizens.

In the spirit of the Thessaloniki Agenda, which confirmed that the future of the countries of the region lies in the European Union, they favour the earliest possible signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Serbia and the European Union so that Serbia could become in time a candidate country and later a full-fledged member of the European Union, benefiting from the available European assistance throughout the whole process.

The three countries look forward to the continued development of their good-neighbourly relations with Serbia and to the strengthening of their traditional ties with its people.

To be issued in Bulgarian, Hungarian and Croatian. Original language: English

END TEXT OF JOINT STATEMENT

BRADTKE